Conference on Disarmament

25 August 2014
English
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Note verbale dated 20 August 2014 from the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation addressed to the Secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament transmitting the comments made by the delegation of the Russian Federation on the report of the informal meetings prepared by the Coordinator on item 3 of the agenda of the Conference entitled "Prevention of an arms race in outer space"

The Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament and has the honour to enclose the comments by the Russian delegation on the report on item 3 "Prevention of an arms race in outer space" of the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament with a request to distribute it as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

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Comments by the Russian delegation on the report on item 3 of the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, "Prevention of an arms race in outer space"

1. At the informal meeting of the Conference on Disarmament held on 15 August, the Russian delegation drew participants' attention to a number of serious factual flaws in the report submitted by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, Matthew Rowland, coordinator of the thematic discussions on this item. We are raising this question again because our proposal on ways to rectify the situation, including by making appropriate corrections, was not really addressed.

2. Our comments relate to the following facts, which, inexplicably, were not reflected in the document.

3. It should be noted that the discussion on not being the first to deploy weapons in outer space has been completely overlooked. During the meetings there was a very lively and substantive exchange of views on various aspects of the initiative. Experts from capitals contributed to the dialogue among delegations. However, the report does not include a single word about it, as if nothing of the kind had occurred.

4. The aforementioned initiative is directly related to disarmament. This provisional measure is intended to be a political guarantee not to place weapons in orbit until the treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects (PPWT) has been concluded and enters into force.

5. The updated Russian-Chinese PPWT text was the object of specific critical remarks reflecting the approaches of some delegations. However, the report neglects to mention the fact that there were no objections to the draft in principle.

6. Moreover, over the years the PPWT text has been the only draft of a legally binding instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) that enjoys broad support. In this regard a number of delegations expressed support not only for continuing work on the text but also for launching negotiations on the basis of the Russian-Chinese draft, proposing that questions and concerns could be addressed along the way. Yet the report does not mention those statements, which have added value for the revitalization of the Conference as a negotiating body.

7. Instead of issues relating to PAROS, attention was focused on the politically binding draft international code of conduct for outer space activities prepared by the European Union. In this regard one may recall that not long ago delegations representing some of the nations involved in or supporting the drafting of the code expressed serious doubts about the idea put forward by Acting Secretary-General Michael Møller to launch negotiations in the Conference on politically binding instruments. In this context it is hard to understand why the report, in its coverage of the discussions in the Conference, gives prominence to the code of conduct.

8. At the same time, the report does not reflect the fact that a number of specific comments were made on the draft. In particular, delegations criticized subparagraph 4.2, which permits the destruction of outer space objects under certain circumstances. If the code is adopted in its current version, this provision will provide a basis for launching "first strike" systems. It seems very strange to be discussing such an initiative in the Conference, one of whose key objectives is, on the contrary, the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

9. Furthermore, a number of delegations questioned the appropriateness of discussing the code of conduct at the Conference, arguing that most of its content was not related to

disarmament issues. Indeed, the problems of security in outer space, including such aspects as space debris and the prevention of incidents, go well beyond the mandate of the Conference. References to this viewpoint are also absent from the report.

10. In this regard it is worth mentioning that the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which deals with basic aspects of the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, has not reviewed the draft code.

11. Generally speaking, we do not question the right of the coordinator to have his own opinion on certain aspects of the discussion covered in the report, for whose compilation he was personally responsible. At the same time, we and other delegations have the right to expect an accurate presentation of the substantive elements of that discussion, which could be of practical use to the Conference.

12. In view of the foregoing, the Russian delegation cannot consider the report either balanced or objective. Moreover, in our view it is unacceptable not to react as appropriate to a report that gives a patently distorted image of the events. We are requesting that the Secretariat publish these comments as an official document of the Conference.

13. In conclusion, the Russian delegation calls on Conference participants to adhere strictly to the consensually adopted agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, especially with respect to core issues such as PAROS.